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MAGAZINE



THE MOCKERY OF AMERICAN DIVORCE

By STEPHEN EWING

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IN DEFENSE OF CYNICISM

BY ERNEST BOYD

IT IS commonly assumed that cynicism is the mark of embitterment and that a cynic, in consequence, is a man who cannot enjoy life. Women, for some reason, are never credited with being cynical, but it would be rash to assume that they get more enjoyment out of life on that account. On those rare occasions when the mere male gets a momentary glimpse of a woman's real conception of life, when he is shown the world about him as it appears to the feminine eye, he usually thanks God that the struggle for existence does not seem to him quite so fierce as that—that is, if he is a cynic. If he is not he probably spends the evening at his club in the company of unhappy sentimentalists like himself. Women, apparently, can take refuge neither in cynicism nor drink; they are pure realists.

Thus, at the very outset, one is confronted by the first tangible evidence of the advantages of cynicism: it is the secret of true masculine happiness, of that happiness which women once imagined they could attain by voting, wielding a latchkey, and refusing to call themselves by their husband's name. A man—cynically—would be perfectly willing to call himself by his wife's name in the circumstances, since he would derive a sardonic pleasure from the thought that, in so doing, he was supposed to be imperilling his personality (if any). The true cynic, so far from resenting, welcomes all opportunities of cheerfully sacrificing the shadow for the substance. He is probably the one person in the world who really enjoys and appreciates the society of the other

sex. The cynicism of men is the only moral equivalent of the realism of women.

No man is born cynical, nor—contrary to the popular belief—can cynicism be thrust upon one: it must be achieved by experience. Yet at the same time it is not a conscious aim; one cannot speak of the pursuit of cynicism as one speaks (so ingenuously) of the pursuit of happiness. A cynic if asked to account for himself would have to reply, like Topsy, "I just growed." To the right kind of temperament it is a benign, painless, and almost insensible process whereby the corrupting influences of idealism are lost, the fierce intolerance of youthful optimism is softened, the unprincipled arrogance of constructive thinking makes way for a sweet and natural disbelief in human nature. A beautiful serenity is the skeptic's reward as he views without indignation the ever-charming spectacle of human folly, while on his happily deaf ears fall the appeals which have immemorially stirred hapless men to futile action. Not for him the facile tears, the wasted emotion, the puerile hopes, and the childish despairs which are the sum of that vicious circle known as the story of mankind. It is unnecessary to address to him that warning which Diderot uttered against Rousseau, "Beware of that man, he believes every word he says."

That is the instinctive attitude of the cynic who has realized the deadly perils of sincerity. On the whole, society knows how to deal with the patent charlatan: we throw him to the mob for

its solemn delectation or put him out of the way if his charlatanism appears to be inopportune. But it requires all the highest resources of cynicism to deal with that subtlest of menaces to life, liberty, and happiness—the absolutely sincere man. It is he who has a constructive program, or is the frenzied supporter of one. It is he who will selflessly labor for the good of his fellow-men, while they groan in helpless resentment, and the immortal gods laugh sardonically. He is the male counterpart of the good woman, whose devastating righteousness is more obvious, but less fatal, because it is practiced in the more restricted field of domestic and personal conduct. Where the good woman may wreck a family or two, the sincere man will cause rioting, civil war, and the desolation of continents.

The cynic knows well the monstrous egotism of selfless devotion and the ruthless cruelty of pure idealism. He has looked with clear eyes on the victims of the hallucination which prompts these phenomena, and prefers the product of a generous and tolerant skepticism. He applies in the realms of ideas, morals, and conduct a code which is almost universally accepted as a matter of superficial social routine so long as it is restricted to matters of passing convenience. The humblest purchaser of the book of etiquette knows that social life would be impossible if everyone were perfectly honest and truthful, and that one must be prepared not to take certain conventions too seriously, or to seek behind them for eternal verities. But people who are willing to make a garden-party a success on those terms will make existence unendurable by ignoring them, as if it were more important and more intelligent to put up with the conversation of a bore at dinner, or to refrain from asking indiscreet questions, than to be as detachedly polite in the presence of the facts of life itself.

Cynicism teaches that it is as naïve and ill-bred to expect a solution to most human problems as to query the white

lies with which we ease the machinery of social life. The fanatical truth-seeker, bent upon reform, believing that progress is anything more than an improvement in plumbing, presents to the cynical mind a picture as distressing as that of a guest insisting that the hostess's hair is false, or insisting that her husband state the exact amount of his income, or where he actually was the last time he telephoned that he was detained at a board meeting. The cynic feels, with Judge Brack, that "people don't do these things," but the contemplation of many metaphorical and actual Hedda Gablers has convinced him that they alarmingly do, thereby providing the *raison d'être* of cynicism, which is the recognition of precisely that fact.

At bottom it is a species of intellectual tact, a feeling that it is slightly indecent, and certainly dreadfully bad manners, to believe too earnestly the usually unbelievable things which engage the attention of the credulous sentimentalist. History and one's own experience show that more tangible good has come of smiling tolerance than from fanatical zeal. If Pontius Pilate had had his way the history of the Western world would have been changed. Horace and Montaigne and Voltaire and Anatole France are nearer to the civilized man's heart than Savonarola, Cotton Mather, or Dwight L. Moody. At their worst they did no positive harm but were charming companions; at their best they did more to make life endurable for others than the solemn altruists. They accepted the fantastic rules of human existence because they were not tortured by that fundamental pessimism, that profound discontent, which can alone explain the actions of those who set out to reform the world.

II

It is always a peculiarity of professional optimists that their own lives are miserable. They can never seize the day, enjoy the hour, accept unreservedly the exquisitely fleeting mo-

ments of pleasure which come to one as irrationally and as unexpectedly as everything else in nature's far from divine plan. Nor do they experience that Nirvana-like condition when, in the absence of positive enjoyment, there is a general sense of well-being as each day dawns and finds the human race as ridiculous and as amusing as ever. Oh! that daily reassurance as one unfolds the newspaper and discovers that one wasn't wrong, that the circus is going on as it has from the beginning of time, with perhaps an extra ring or two added each century. No wonder the serious thinker, whatever his professions, is depressed by the evident futility of his hopes, even though his retort is to plunge still deeper into the labyrinth of progress and reform!

It is obviously impossible to hurl oneself during a lifetime against the jagged rocks of reality and feel happy about it save on the same principle as ascetics flagellate themselves, sadists inflict pain, and masochists beg to be hurt and humiliated. While the pleasure of these perversions is admitted, we know the pleasure to be pathological and do not take it as a normal index of enjoyment. Similarly, while martyrs invariably—their admirers tell us—rejoice in the torture inflicted upon them, their doing so is merely a reflection upon their inability for normal rejoicing, their unhealthy satisfaction in substitutes for the pleasures and satisfactions of this world. As well argue that a girl would not prefer to know that she was pretty than to hear herself acclaimed the foremost authority on cuneiform inscriptions in South Dakota. The wish to be both would, of course, be sheer idealism at its worst.

Every cynic knows that his optimism dates from the moment when he began to lose his youthful belief in human perfectibility and his youthful conviction that he was born to help to improve it. In the anguished years of one's nonage, armed with a highly plausible and unscrupulously optimistic theory of the universe, one's own personal feelings

were pessimistic. If it takes the ingenuousness of youth to be a theoretical optimist, it takes the cynicism of later years not to be a practical pessimist. Nature, with characteristic malignity, saddles one at that age with the crushing burden of an optimistic philosophy of life in general, without supplying the fortitude requisite to reconcile it with the brutal facts of which one is all too conscious. Hence the deep-seated melancholy of a young man with a scheme for peopling the earth with supermen or establishing a reign of justice and freedom amongst men.

It is a curious fact that, while convention pretends that youth and happiness are more or less synonymous, we have embodied in the proverbial phrase "if youth but knew" our profound conviction of the contrary. What are the implications of the proverb? Obviously, that knowledge and experience are essential to a proper understanding and enjoyment of life, and that the average man usually acquires these too late to enable him to profit by them. In the circumstances his existence falls into two periods of frustration—when he is too young to know any better and too old to do any better. It is the cynic's good fortune to have avoided that fate; he knows in time to take the fullest advantage of his knowledge. Hence the resentment of the sentimentalists and Utopians, expressed in the current superstition that cynicism is a manifestation of bitter rage, and in Bernard Shaw's statement that every man over forty is a scoundrel—which, being interpreted, means that he is then best equipped to resist the persuasion of the soothsayers.

When we are young we are unhappy because we believe too many things which are either untrue or unprovable. In disillusionment lies true happiness if one has the good luck to become disillusioned gracefully, that is, cynically. Indignation and cynicism do not properly belong together; in fact, the latter excludes the former, and the reason why

cynicism is so widely misunderstood and mistrusted is that so many people either refuse to grow up intellectually or are unable to stand successfully the shock of disillusionment. A person troubled by morbid fears and terrorized by superstitions is seen at once to be a pitiable object by people not similarly affected. One man's beliefs are another man's superstitions, yet only the cynic is capable of drawing the obvious conclusion that the fewer one's beliefs the greater one's peace of mind.

Here and there occasional exceptional individuals are found who can be trusted with an idea, a belief, but it is evident that these things were never intended for general consumption. They are bad for the average human being, both individually and collectively. Personally he is miserable when the weight of an idea affects his consciousness; in the mass he is dangerous when he rallies his fellows to action on behalf of it. What is history, after all, but the record of the periodical crusades for or against some bogey which believing men have evolved out of their credulity and fear? Sometimes it is an idea, sometimes a person, sometimes a nation, sometimes a race, but at all times it is a phantom, usually inexplicable to posterity, and often to the crusaders themselves, once they have recovered from the stampede.

A cynic can be trusted neither to make his own life nor the lives of others miserable on principle. His social agnosticism is his salvation. He does not and cannot prevent others from bemusing themselves and bedevilling their existence, but he is temperamentally unable to join in. He can be trusted with even the most explosive ideas, for his attitude towards them is comparable to that of a book-collecting connoisseur who handles the most priceless volumes without damaging them, whereas the earnest student returns his dog-eared volume to the library in even a worse condition than before. Like many an honest bibliophile, he may not even open them. Cynicism is, therefore, conducive

to peace, to urbanity, to all the virtues which spring from a skeptical feeling of neutrality in the thousand and one matters over which the mass of men groan, exult, and—fight. It will hardly be denied that Copenhagen and Barcelona were more agreeable places of residence in 1915 than Rheims or Cologne. Cynicism is a species of benevolent intellectual neutrality. Neutrals, of course, are always scoundrels in the eyes of the combatants.

However, as a matter of realistic fact rather than sentimental fiction, there is no doubt that a soldier on leave who could have gone to a good hotel in Barcelona, instead of London or Paris, would have enjoyed his leave much more, and have taken a somewhat different view of the question of Spanish neutrality than the eminent statesmen who so bitterly resented the existence of any unviolated spot in Europe. On the same principle, one would instinctively turn to a cynic for understanding and guidance in time of trouble, for his help would be forthcoming without tracts and sermons. It was not the cynical but the pious father who drove his erring daughter into the streets, when a little common sense and knowledge of the world might have saved her from a life of shame and playgoers from many a heart-rending scene.

A vast amount of trouble in the world could be avoided if we were only blessed with the gift of cynicism. If it were the business of a cynic to make converts and outline a program with which to lure customers one might dwell on some of the manifold advantages which would automatically follow conversion. Death would lose its terrors because it would be accepted without the faintest thought or hope of reward, punishment, or survival. Life would lose some of its horrors, for no army could be enlisted from recruits cynically convinced that militarism and pacifism were equally absurd and a hero's grave the most undignified imaginable; no politician could orate, because cynical laughter would greet his

preposterous rodomontade; no government could be elected along popular lines because cynicism and adult suffrage are incompatible terms.

Minor amenities resulting from a world inhabited by convinced cynics are too numerous to mention. The marriage problem would be solved without the aid of Judge Lindsey, because jealousy and domestic sentimentality are emotions unknown to the disillusioned affection of cynicism. Follow-up letters, sales talks, fraternal orders, Mother's Day, publicity agents, radio programs, law enforcement, non-refillable bottles—but why enumerate all the varied and variegated strains upon human credulity which are so profitably used to beguile the tedium of the average life between one slaughter and another, between the unwanted cradle and the unremembered grave? Seek ye first the serenity of cynicism and all these will be added unto you.

III

One unconsciously adopts the evangelical manner and steps out of character in thus preaching the cynic's gospel. Of course, he has none. All he can say, speaking for himself, is that he is unmoved by most of the things that seem to disturb his fellow-men, and he concludes that if there were no demand for buncombe there would be no supply. That is why he has no remedies to suggest, no discipline to enforce, no great moral truth to vindicate. He has never discovered that life has any particular meaning, and he strongly suspects the meanings read into it by ingenuous people who are patently incapable of drawing a sound conclusion from the obvious facts before them. He has noticed that the kind of person whose lips move when spelling out a tabloid newspaper has no difficulty in settling the profoundest questions which have engaged the best minds of history.

If he had a gospel and were uncynical enough to imagine he could get converts, his cynicism would restrain him, for how

could a cynic be cynical if there were no material for his cynicism to feed upon? If the infinitesimal minority of civilized and, therefore, skeptical minds became a majority, the cynic would have a rude awakening; something would have to be done to restore his disbelief in humanity. He knows, however, that his fears are groundless. Nature began her work well, but we have improved upon it. Whatever illusion may have been possible when the masses were inarticulate, it is now humanly impossible for any but the professional optimists to believe that civilization is the aim of mankind. Save in its plumbing implications, the word grows more and more meaningless, and in due process of time, when every bedroom is equipped with a radio and inspirational talks in Moscow can be heard every night in Pittsburgh, when go-getting salesmen can telephone to Tokyo and see one another's intellectual countenances through television, when airplanes leave for Paris every hour on the hour, when every theater is a movie and every basement in New York a speakeasy—when the triumphs of progress are even more manifest than now, the very memory of what was once and for so long understood as civilized will be a vague memory.

In the approaching synthetic civilization new values will be substituted for old, and people will no more understand what the term really connotated than a post-Prohibition flapper can realize what was once meant by drinking. Graduates in How to Build Up a Mail Order Business courses will doubtless assume that such were the preoccupations of the scholars of Oxford or the Sorbonne, and a hip-flask culture will be the logical sequel to the hip-flask alcoholic initiation of the rising generation. In such a world of live wires and exponents of Service there is little danger of too much cynicism. It may be hard-boiled and corrupt, but it will be sentimental, not cynical. The decline of cynicism corresponds roughly with the rise of industrialism, and the eighteenth cen-

ture saw its last and finest flowering in literature. It is an ornament, perhaps the chief ornament, of a civilization that is on the wane.

There will be, presumably, unless they have been lynched, a remnant of the old order, and in that dwindling number the cynics of the future will be found. By that time the pleasures of cynicism will have become so acute and exquisite that these survivors will be to the cynic of to-day what a thoroughbred is to a Clydesdale, both fine animals, but one of a more refined quality. That is as it should be, for the most delicate instrument will be required to measure the complacent and barbarous ignominy of the absurd spectacle. One sighs cynically for the privilege of being present and of seeing one's worst suspicions confirmed. The show will be on the grandest scale, and that ridiculous biped, man, will have surpassed himself. The mountain of industrial and scientific progress will bring forth its mouse, and it will be a little tame, white mouse, running around in its cage, not even the sturdy household variety which still adventures in search of cheese, at the risk of encountering the feline enemy. It will eat out of its master's hand.

It is not easy in advance to measure the density of cynicism nor the volume which will be provoked in that surviving remnant, but a cynical guess may be made by estimating the effect of modern civilization upon Swift or Voltaire, upon Horace or Juvenal. Swift at the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, Voltaire in the League of Nations Council, Horace in conference with an efficiency expert, Juvenal writing the Sixth Satire in terms of Hollywood—of such stuff the dreams of cynicism are made. With the relatively meager material at their disposal, they have left us records that are imperishable, while the vast wealth of our accumulated imbecility lies unexploited. The reason probably is that the cynic of to-day has no longer even the illusion that his cynicism can help. He keeps it to himself, a refuge in his daily hours of need, and the last stronghold of masculine privilege which has not been invaded by women. When that invasion takes place, the cynic's occupation will be truly gone, for the end will be in sight. Life will not go on.

But, the cynical mind reflects, that would mean progress in the best sense of the word. A truce to such pretty, sentimental daydreams.





AMERICANS ARE BOYS

A SPANIARD LOOKS AT OUR CIVILIZATION

BY SALVADOR DE MADARIAGA

SOONER or later the Spaniard feels the call of the blood and sallies forth in order to discover America. I have discovered America, which means, of course, that I know next to nothing about it. Yet, in all truth, America was not quite unknown to me. I had lived for six years in one of the most important American cities in Europe—Geneva—whose fertile soil brings forth every summer a plentiful harvest of distinguished Americans, all turning their faces to the League as sunflowers their corollas to the sun. I was then one of the rays in the League's Sun and grew to be quite conscious of the warmth and light which it was my privilege to convey from the Sun of Peace to the open, eager faces come from afar to behold it. I had grown to like those faces. They were clear, they were frank, they were earnest, with more fun than humor in their ever-youthful features. And by observing them year after year I had come to the conclusion that what I liked in them was that they reminded me of children.

Then I began to notice their English. I was impressed by the fact that they said "an elevator" instead of "a lift" and "an uplifting experience" instead of "an elevating experience." Now, Latin-English is the more refined, the nobler, and the more self-conscious of the two. This inversion in the use of Latin- and Saxon-English suggested, therefore, an inversion of the standard of values adopted in England. For the English, the more solemn of the two movements upwards is the moral; for the American,

the physical. For the American, therefore, the world of tangible things is a noble and an earnest world. The child believes in his toys and respects them.

America, then, appeared to me as an immense up-to-date nursery and boys' school fitted with the most wonderful toys and games you could imagine. Who was the gigantic Father Christmas who invented the skyscraper? That skyline which refused to reveal itself to us as the boat felt its way up New York haven in thick fog, was it not like a colossal Christmas shop window glittering with lights? And think of all that those beautiful towers and palaces conceal behind their embroidered cliffs! Think of the elevators (my hat to their importance) coming and going behind their beautiful brass filigree cages, with all their neat little buttons and lights and arrows red and green, and the boy so spick and span you could hardly believe he was a real boy, least of all when he announces the floor in an unintelligible yell which seems to burst out of his stuffed body under mechanical compulsion. Think of the lovely marble floors, thick carpets, barber shops, all resplendent with mirrors and nicked bars and, oh! the marvelous chairs pivoting in all meridians and parallels like telescopes for the barber to observe and operate on your beauty under every possible angle and light—and the mechanical appliances for brushing your hair and for drying it, all moving electrically, so fast and with so much wonderful noise. . . .

II

There is a boy in Detroit who had a capital idea. He made up his mind that every boy and girl in the house—I mean in America—was going to have a magnificent toy: a car on wheels and going by itself. None of those cars which had to be wound up, but a real automobile, which means that it goes on its own. A real thing, going for miles and miles without being wound at all—at least nowadays, for at first there was a bit of winding to do before the thing started and a not very pleasant job at that, particularly in winter. Now the fact is this boy has transformed the whole nursery and school with his idea, and everybody is so happy that no nursery was ever quieter in the world and the Nurse in Washington can knit the threads of her policy in blissful peace.

Boys are naturally given to boasting and exaggeration. The American language differs from English in that it seeks the top of expression while English seeks its lowly valleys. An Englishman would have found seemly and moderate, if vague, euphemisms for what America calls nowadays "wet" and "dry." But even these uncompromising expressions prove too weak for the American taste, and so we have come to read that Senator A is bone-dry while Governor B is dripping wet. The *Times* (London) would have dropped an almost incomprehensible and labyrinthine hint in its City Columns to obtain the same effect which the Philadelphia *Ledger* sought in saying on its first page: "The Department of State came down to-day with both feet upon any and all proposals to float loans in the United States for the benefit of Soviet Russia." Some boy, that Department of State! And where an English newspaper would have written, "Preparatory measures are being taken for an April primary by Senator D and his friends," the *Chicago Tribune* announces that, "Senator D and his associates jumped at full stride yesterday into the race to get ready for an April

primary." True the *Chicago Tribune* has to live up to its claim: "The world's greatest newspaper." Yet, the point is that it lives up to it by such powerful "dramatizing" of facts, just as it dramatizes its own building by making of it the tallest tower in Chicago, several inches taller than (unless it is the reverse, which hardly matters) the tower built by a chewing-gum firm. But if a chewing-gum tower is not in its place in a nursery, what on earth is your idea of a nursery, I ask? For my part, I find that chewing-gum habit one of the most significant features of the juvenile state of America. It is, moreover, subtly connected with the boyish (and American) habit of exaggeration, for all exaggerating phrases end in "the world" (the greatest paper in the world); and "the world" is pronounced by the American Boy with a peculiar flourish of the tongue which suggests an exceptional length of the said organ, as if it could be, and was, twisted and turned and made into a knot—a fact due no doubt to the gymnastical exercises which the American tongue goes through in gum-chewing.

Let us then make up our minds that the higher of the two towers is the chewing-gum building. It must be. It should be. It is. It stands for the innumerable sentences which represent the refusal of every American Boy to accept any standard below the topmost in the *world*. Quantity is the first standard to appear in the scale of human values; and as the maximum is the quantity of quantity (all other levels of quantity being but qualities of quantity), "the greatest in the world" is the most frequent standard of comparison in the greatest nursery in the world.

Pride? Perhaps. But how much simple humility under that juvenile pride! Boys are proud with humble standards, and it is the play of pride and humility which is attractive in them.

They board one another like children, with no social reserve, no cold formality. "My name is John. Do you like to

play with me?"—so say children. And they, "My name is Smith. I am much interested in your work. . . ." Or else, "I came late to your lecture and did not hear the Chairman's introduction. Who are you?" They are direct, frank, and spontaneous, like children. They want to know because they are curious, not because they seek some advantage from the information they are asking. They just want to know. There are so many things in the world and so thrilling, if only one could know them. And the American Boy has kept intact the juvenile capacity for being thrilled. So, being wealthy children, they make their European uncles come over to tell them stories. Every boat brings at least one of them, always, of course, the most famous European uncle in the *world*, known the world over for his ability to spin yarns on a particular line—politics, philosophy, literature, or travel—and the children go and listen to him and are thrilled and grateful to the European uncle who has taught them so much and kept them out of mischief for at least one hour.

They are hungry and thirsty for information—facts, stories. But they dislike thought, as all sound, healthy children do. None of your highbrow stuff for fine lads who can enjoy themselves making toys and playing with them. Knowledge, yes. By all means. Some boys must know all about how toys are made and moved to and fro, and distributed fairly in the nursery, or there would be no fun. Knowledge, however, is all right. It can be checked and put to some use, both made something of and kept busy, so to say. It can be turned into a toy, so that by means of little machines with colored lamps and buttons and switches the springs of the soul-machine may be shown to the whole nursery. There is a mighty boy in Columbia University who is a master in that game. He's just discovered how blond girls are more sensitive than brunettes by showing them love films while they had all sorts of something-meters and what-d'you-call-

them-graphs attached to their wrists and placed on their left breasts, their imagination meanwhile wandering God knows where. Great fun, I tell you, this knowledge game.

No wonder they like it. For knowledge is not only good fun but also useful and recognized as a commendable thing by all grown-ups. But principles and theories are quite another matter. They are dangerous things. God knows where they might lead. That is the way people turn radical, and once Boys began to be radicals, the whole nursery would be agog and the Boys divided for good, instead of just for a game of politics as they are divided now into Republicans and Democrats with not a pin to choose between them but, oh! such fierce quarrels and such agitation and shouting and organizing and playing at Committees and denouncing this and the other in dead earnest and choosing one particular lad and turning him into a hero, either because he speaks well or because he is always wonderfully silent, or because he is wet or maybe for being dry, or for descending from one of the masts of the *Mayflower*, or perhaps for being a self-made man—just someone to become a hero and a great man; and once chosen, they work for him and shout for him and fight for him and die for him and forget all about him when he is safely seated on his stately chair and the fun of the fight is over.

III

Splendid Boys! Their imagination is always at boiling point. With the little ones, it takes terrifying forms. They dream of dreadful dangers and bogies—the Catholic Church and the Rising Tide of Color, lurking in the night, ready to devour the whole nursery with a snappy movement of their powerful and sinister jaws. The little ones are terrified yet brave. To give themselves a countenance, and in the hope of frightening away the monsters, they grant one another grand, high-sounding titles: "Imperial Wizard," they whisper; and

then they rise from their cots, in their long white nightgowns, and put masks on their faces and peaked caps on their heads and weird paper ornaments on their chests, and try to chase the dreaded fiends with yells and shouts and dances and the magic power of the thrice-repeated letter K.

Happy in their spacious nursery, the Boys hardly ever look through the window. Why should they? A wide street of water separates them from the old house opposite whence their parents came long ago, oh, so very, very, very long ago, you know. . . . Longer, in fact, than any child's memory can hold. They cannot see the old house, but they know it only too well. Don't they know it? Some of them, the more idle, venture over the water now and then. What for? I ask you. Just to waste their money and to forget their good nursery manners over there. For it is a fact that the old place is decrepit and dissolute and backward at that. They can't make toys nearly as fast as we do, nor as cheap, and they cannot even agree among themselves. See. We are forty-eight states living in perfect union. Why don't they follow our example? The causes are exactly alike. We are all Americans. They are all foreigners. Surely they might agree if they had any decency. No wonder America remains aloof in her romantic dreams. Romantic and quixotic, she refuses to see realities other than she imagines them, and she keeps loyal to her sacred memories, regardless of her material interests. She has made up her mind that every European statesman is a super-intellectual machiavel, and it is no use showing her photographs of European statesmen: she remains faithful to her fond illusion. She has a vague notion that her beloved Washington, long, oh, long ago, shook a tender yet stern finger at her, "Now, see you do not get entangled with Europeans!" and in vain her hard-boiled financiers point out to her that her European interests are worth several of her States: America half-closes her dreaming eyes and mur-

murs to herself, "HE told me I was to remain unentangled." Romantic America! . . .

Do you require further proofs? See the place which woman occupies in her life. The Boys have hoisted her on to a pedestal of admiration. Her power and privileges flow from the position she occupies as an idealized type of humanity. In her youth, the inspirer, in her maturer years, the leader of men. First, the sweetheart of the nation, then her aunt, woman governs America because America is a land of boys who refuse to grow up. She it is who rises to the activities reserved for grown-up people: general ideas, æsthetic enjoyment, culture, understanding of the world. The Boys around her live a life of fun and activity, caught in the "behaviorism" of club and school standards which they scrupulously respect, faithful to tradition and to a collective earth which their inexperienced minds are afraid to leave. She dares explore the Heaven and Hell of individualism, the wider responsibilities of thought, and the wider liberties of experience. The Boys look up to her—her beauty, first, then her intelligence, her culture, her wisdom. As the sweetheart of the nation, she keeps the Boys happy and healthy with her affection; as the nation's aunt, she made up her mind the Boys were not to drink, and the Boys are dry. Not that they like it over much, but, when asked, they sigh first, smile afterwards, cast a side glance at *Her* and concede, "We are better off as it is."

IV

Youth is also selfish, and the Boys are selfish enough. Toys or no toys, there is money in them, and everybody knows what is behind money—more toys, of course. Large colored boards yell their alluring promises to the "Successful" boy, tempting everyone to climb to the top with delicious vistas which no boy can resist—glossy cars, velvet-skinned beauties, travel, and cigarettes. Opportunities are large and numerous; skill and

energy always sure of a reward. But every boy must look out for himself and "people don't go into business for their health." Boyish selfishness can be cruel.

But if boys are selfish, they can also be generous. These healthy and energetic Boys count the money they get but not the money they give.

For these children, so direct, so spontaneous, so ill-mannered at times, at times so ignorant and so secure in their self-satisfied limitations, these children so healthy and so strong even in their defects, are good. They are good children and they want to be good children. No nation, except perhaps that admirable England from whose old house they came (of that, there is no doubt) can show a higher sense of social duty and service than this Boy-Club which America is. Every boy and girl wants to serve. The lure of common service is so strong that many a woman fails to see in motherhood and the home a sufficient justification for her existence, and wants to be a citizen and a business woman rather than a mother or a wife. The common weal is the law; demagogues and political crooks can reach their ends only by pretending to be the champions of the community. The vices of American politics spring from ignorance and gullibility but not from lack of public spirit. It is with public spirit diverted to wrong ends that political mountebanks misgovern here and there in the wide country. Another juvenile feature comes here into play—an astounding credulity, an unbelievable faith in those who know. And Americans are justified in their credulity by the unbelievable things which they have witnessed in their lifetime. They believe in fairy tales partly because they are still in that age, partly because they live in the midst of them. They can spin fairy tales themselves with that placid assurance of the child who begins by believing in his inventions before inviting you to listen to them.

Children, for all their fuss about independence and individualism, are profoundly gregarious. American boys

seek one another's company for everything. Play and prayer, feast and fast, lesson and leisure—all is arranged in common. Even the most individualistic enterprises . . . America is the land of "petting parties"! Kiwanis and Rotarians are but symbolic institutions of a gregarious spirit which permeates all American life. Let us meet. Let us meet for Heaven's sake. Let us not remain alone. The mind is so queer. God knows what it might be up to if we gave it a chance. Why! it might even grow up and *think*. No. Let us clap one another's shoulder and be merry. We may even have a lecturer to spin a yarn to us. It won't be long and we need not remember it after he's gone. But let us meet.

That gregarious spirit is shaping the nation out of the heterogeneous elements which a century of immigration has brought to it. A strong collective consciousness is the key-note.

V

These children are children of giants, and their toys are huge. Their materialism is a mere phase in their development, not an essential feature of their character. Let us remember how it affects all their being, even their art, even their intellect, even the very movements of their soul.

They love "research" and recoil instinctively from speculative thought because research is the most material form of intellectual exercise, and that in which mental initiative is more closely guided and sustained by nature. Moreover, the old house of Mother Nature is a wonderful place in which to roam in search of odd corners and hidden rooms. In the strong attachment towards research to be found in the American I find, therefore, a sign of intellectual life in its first phase: that of first acquaintance with the world outside, of still fresh appetite for adventure into the ocean of tangible things; and, further, the utilitarian sense of youth

and the instinctive mistrust which young intellects feel of their own powers to fly into the thin air of speculation. But the strong tendency towards research is in itself a feature wholly dissimilar to the dislike of *all* intellectual effort which typifies the Englishman. Inherently, the American is not intellectually incurious. His curiosity is keen. And, therefore, though superficially some of his intellectual characteristics may recall those of the Englishman (and though historically and racially they are no doubt related to English traits), the American differs from the Englishman in that he is more energetically prone to intellectual work. Hence here is a distinctive promise of growth.

A similar conclusion suggests itself when American artistic life is considered. America excels in architecture. The fact deserves notice. Why should architecture be the American art par excellence? A mere glance at the arts will provide the answer. Art, I take it (I wish professors of æsthetics and critics would "take" it also) is the conveyance of spirit by means of matter. Now the arts may be classified in a kind of scale or hierarchy according to the weight and density of matter which they require. At the bottom end of the scale is architecture. Then come sculpture, painting, poetry, and finally music. Poetry needs ideas and concepts in which a shade of matter still lingers. In music, of the three elements which compose it, timbre still retains a shade of matter; rhythm and numbers are purely spiritual. Architecture, at the other end, is massive and utilitarian. Thus America's success in architecture appears to us as another manifestation of the material phase of her development.

Were America a land permanently poor in the arts, she might have shown herself relatively more proficient in some aesthetic form of life other than architecture. But the fact that, while but moderately successful in other arts, she should excel in architecture shows that we are in the presence of the *beginning*

of a hopeful artistic career. Thus, after architecture, the best American art is sculpture, and then painting; while poetry and music come last.

For American sensibility is still profoundly material. Hence the tendency to material metaphors for describing the motions of the soul, generally represented in American language as movements of a body: *uplifted, thrilled*, are examples in point. But these examples in themselves (even when American exaggeration is discounted) as well as the obvious vitality of American architecture, show that American sensibility is naturally rich, just as we found that American intellect is naturally keen. The future of American life is, therefore, full of possibilities. The Boys will grow.

VI

Unless . . . A phase may be a mere phase and yet be dangerous for all that. Materialism begets its apostles and its pontiffs; it can (what can not?) be turned into a religion. The combination of materialism with the gregarious tendency is one of the most abominable enemies of true and healthy growth.

The visitor who wanders about among men and institutions soon realizes that the power of business over intellectual life is stronger in America than anywhere in Europe—leaving aside, of course, Russia, in which it is absolute. Here, it seems to me, must be found the cause of the relative uniformity of intellectual views which is one of the most striking facts for the visitor in contemporary America. When the Spanish State became a Church (a tendency alive to-day in the American State: see American flags on altars), the inquisition burned heretics. In America heretics are frozen out. The process requires a different temperature, yet is equally severe. But St. Augustine thought that it was good there should be heretics. And so do some of us.

Perhaps these are growth pains of the American boy. Perhaps he will outlive

them. If not, the world will lose a great civilization. For the promise of America is great and its fulfilment should be desired by all those for whom life is to be loved for itself, out of all considerations of space, time, or race. Even now there are in America living witnesses of the spiritual power which she has in store. Her highest achievements are not her mighty factories—toys and toy-making, after all—nor her skyscrapers—toys, again—but the charm of some of her women. A charm which, independent as it is, independent of sex and age, is a definite spiritual wealth, a recognizable flower of life. It may be argued that of such women there are only a few. Of course. A woman of charm is as rare as a man of genius. But when a country gives forth a man of genius, she proves her worth for all time. And when a country is sprinkled with women of charm she proves that a life is in her which may yet make the world open its eyes and wonder.

DIRGE WITHOUT MUSIC

BY EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY

I AM not resigned to the shutting away of loving hearts in the hard ground.
 So it is, and so it will be, for so it has been time out of mind:
 Into the darkness they go, the wise and the lovely; crowned
 With lilies and with laurel they go; but I am not resigned.

Lovers and thinkers, into the earth with you.
 Be one with the dull, the indiscriminate dust.
 A fragment of what you felt, of what you knew,
 A formula, a phrase remains—but the best is lost.

The answers quick and keen, the honest look, the laughter, the love,
 They are gone; they are gone to feed the roses. Elegant and curled
 Is the blossom; fragrant is the blossom. I know. But I do not approve.
 More precious was the light in your eyes than all the roses of the world.

Down, down, down into the darkness of the grave
 Gently they go, the beautiful, the tender, the kind;
 Quietly they go, the intelligent, the witty, the brave.
 I know. But I do not approve. And I am not resigned.